

Kansas City Star

March 19, 2002

India's government must do more to stop the continuing religious violence there. And the United States should press India's rulers harder to keep that vitally important country from bursting into civil war. Sectarian fighting has gone on there for decades, but the most recent horrors began Feb. 27. A clash between Muslims and a group of unruly Hindu passengers resulted in the incineration of Hindus - many of them women and children - on a train in western India.

Since then more than 700 people - Hindus and Muslims - have died in the unrest. Reporters covering the atrocities say that in hospital morgues in Gujarat state, charred bodies of dozens of children go unclaimed. In the latest violence on Sunday, Hindus attacked Muslims under police escort, killing two and wounding 15.

The **U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom** has asked the Bush administration to push India's government harder "to halt the atrocities and violence and bring the perpetrators to justice." That's exactly what must be done.

The commission said various Hindu nationalist groups, known collectively as Sangh Parivar, believe "that only Hindus are 'real' Indians." That makes "foreigners" - in the view of Sangh Parivar - of the 12 percent of Muslims and 2.3 percent of Christians who live in the country of more than 1 billion people.

A Hindu nationalist political group that espouses at least some of those views, the Bharatiya Janata Party, has led India's national government since 1998.

"The United States government must speak out strongly against both the increasing

attacks on minorities and the ideology of hate behind them," the commission said.

India is a crucial American partner in that part of the world. The war on terrorism may depend in part on keeping India stable. That's a big reason more must be done to stop the violence.